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BRIEFS

BERMUDA'S LAWMAKERS NIX SAME SEX MARRIAGE

HAMILTON, Bermuda (BP) — The Bermuda Legislature has outlawed same sex marriage only months after the Bermuda Supreme Court approved it. The Domestic Partnership Act signed by Governor John Rankin on Feb. 7 denies marriage to same sex couples, but allows both homosexual and heterosexual couples to enter into partnerships with certain legal rights previously held only by heterosexual married couples. Bermuda attorney Mark Pettingill, who successfully represented homosexual plaintiffs in the 2017 Bermuda Supreme Court case, told Bernews he is studying avenues of challenging the law.

NAMB TO EXPAND PUERTO RICO TIES

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP) — The North American Mission Board (NAMB) is adding Puerto Rico to its list of special areas that will receive increased attention and resources for church planting, Send Relief ministries, and partnership. The emphasis comes as Puerto Rico continues to slowly recover from the staggering toll Hurricane Maria took on the island when it struck last Sept. 20. Since the storm hit, NAMB along with Southern Baptist volunteers from several state Baptist conventions have been actively leading relief efforts.

CREATION DEFENDER CANCELLED AT UNIV.

EDMOND, Okla. (BP) — Noted Christian apologist and creationist Ken Ham has been dropped from the speaking lineup at the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) in Edmond after a campus LGBT group complained to event organizers, Ham said. He was to speak March 5 on Genesis and the State of the Culture, but the UCO Student Association cancelled the event when the pro-LGBT group objected, said the founder of the Answers in Genesis apologetics ministry and the driving force behind the Creation Museum and Ark Encounter attractions, both located in Kentucky.

Platt announces departure from IMB



DAVID PLATT

Pledges to stay on while trustees initiate search for agency's next leader

RICHMOND, Virginia (Special) — Citing a personally-felt need to involve himself more deeply in leading local church work, International Mission Board (IMB) President David Platt on Feb. 12 asked the Southern Baptist mission agency's trustees to immediately begin searching for his successor.

Platt also announced his decision step down to IMB field personnel and staff, in person and via e-mail to those not in Richmond.

Platt will continue to serve until a new president is elected. A presidential search committee will be comprised of IMB trustees selected by trustee chairman Rick Dunbar, member of First Church, Madison, and a physician.

Platt began serving last year as a teaching pastor at multi-campus McLean Bible Church in northern Virginia, while at the same time retaining his role as head of IMB. The IMB

trustee executive committee agreed to allow Platt to serve in those dual roles as they evaluated the situation.

The executive committee had apparently not reached any conclusions at the time of Platt's announcement that he is leaving IMB.

According to information obtained by The Baptist Record from the IMB web site in September of last year, McLean Bible Church became a cooperating church with the SBC in 2016 and serves as a "hub for the North American Mission Board's church planting efforts in the Washington, D.C. area."

Platt is currently listed as "Pastor-Teacher" on the McLean Bible Church web site.

Platt told trustees, missionaries, and staff that during his nearly four-year tenure at IMB, he has been "burdened to continue preaching and leading in the local church," which led him to a teaching pastor role at McLean Bible Church in Northern Virginia alongside his leadership of IMB.

"I am more passionate today than I have ever been about get-

see PLATT on p. 7

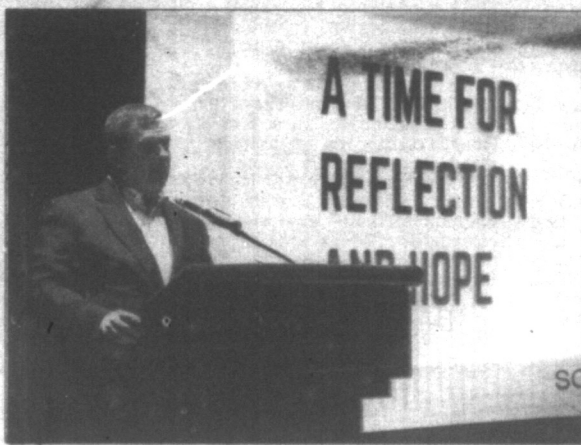
LifeWay making changes for future

NASHVILLE (BP) — Future shoppers will find fundamental changes when they visit LifeWay Christian Stores, trustees were told at their semiannual meeting Feb. 5-6.

LifeWay leaders shared a vision of stores where people will gather not only to buy biblical solutions for life but also to connect, learn and grow.

"The opportunities to do more are just amazing," LifeWay President and CEO Thom S. Rainer told trustees. "In God's power we seek to transform lives and serve churches."

Several LifeWay stores have begun testing the new approach with special events and places to gather. Eric Geiger,



THOM RAINER

see LIFEWAY on p. 8

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

This is news?

Just when we think the mainstream secular news media can go no lower, they surprise us. We've known for some time that extinction was near for clear, unbiased journalism that objectively reports all sides of a story and allows us to make up our own minds on where we stand. Slowly but surely — and lately, much faster and more certain than ever — standards of professional conduct in the news media have vanished.

Most people recall when the impeccable 60 Minutes news magazine on CBS secretly rigged a pickup truck to explode, to deceive us into believing their storyline that the brand of vehicle involved was unsafe. It wasn't, but the dramatic staging of the explosion would have us believe it was.

The 60 Minutes fabrication was a wake-up alarm for many of us that an American institution we trusted almost completely was in danger of losing credibility. There have been thousands of illustrations since then of the sense of trustworthiness developing among viewers of secular news media. We've learned a great deal in the intervening years, but the secular news media still hold tremendous power to shape and package a story not for truthful retelling and public enlightenment but for the advancement of an agenda.

The problem is that practitioners of the dark arts of the secular news media don't give the American people much credit for seeing through their bias-driven deceptions. With putatively serious secular news reporting looking more and more like entertainment, reporters and editors and executives have developed the self-centeredness of Hollywood types who look down on the great unwashed masses (also known as flyover country) that made them famous in the first place.

The latest example of this well-established trend is the fawning adulation in the U.S. news media for Kim Yo Jong at the Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea. Kim Yo Jong is the younger sister of one of the cruellest dictators of the modern era, Kim Jong Un of North Korea, who dispatched his sibling on a charm offensive to the games currently being held in his hated neighbor nation to the south.

Kim Yo Jong serves her brother's totalitarian atheist regime as director of the Cabinet-level propaganda and agitation department, and is considered his closest confidant in a political structure that is unparalleled in its paranoia and ruthlessness toward its own citizens. That makes her complicit in the mass starvation of North Koreans and the brutal imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of others in Stalin-style gulags where they are tortured and sometimes fed to ravenous dogs.

Defectors have alleged that one prison camp is set aside for special mistreatment of Christians for such offenses as possessing a Bible or attempting to attend an underground worship service.

All of this while the Kim family, including Kim Yo Jong, live in luxury and assassinate blood relatives like their older brother Kim Jong Nam.

Kim Jong Un's sister is stealing the show at the Winter Olympics, the cable television news network CNN glowingly observed in a headline on its web site. "If diplomatic dance" were an event at the Winter Olympics, CNN went on to croon, "Kim Jong Un's younger sister would be favored to win gold."

The New York Times, describing the "sprinkles of freckles on her cheeks," reported of Kim Yo Jong: "Flashing a sphinx-like smile and without ever speaking in public, Ms. Kim managed to outflank Mr. Trump's envoy to the Olympics, Vice President Mike Pence, in the game of diplomatic image-making."

Not to be outdone, the Washington Post crowed that Kim Jong Yo was "youthful [and] photogenic," an obvious slap aimed at Pence, and she possessed "high cheekbones and fine ears," probably meant as another catty insult to the vice-president.

Many major secular news outlets like CNN, the New York Times, and the Washington Post are so professionally corrupt and intellectually dishonest that they are willing to foist such nonsense on people like you and me that they consider their ignorant inferiors — even while operations like CNN are announcing deep budget cuts because advertising revenue is falling.

They just don't get it, so perhaps we should continue to explain it to them with our TV channel selectors.

Rethinking Heaven

Even though I grew up going to church and hearing about the "end times" and everlasting life, heaven always seemed like an intangible far-off idea.

Because I had repented of my sin and placed my trust in Jesus, I believed that I would "go to heaven when I die," but my vision of heaven was populated by clouds and golden palaces and angelic visions. It wasn't until I began studying the biblical teaching on heaven that my vision shifted.

We tend to think of heaven as the ethereal home of disembodied spirits and in a way, of course, it is but we forget that Scripture tells us Elijah was taken to heaven. So was Enoch. The risen, glorified, incarnate Christ is there, taking up material space. He is touchable, present.

Clearly, heaven is not less real than earth but more real. It is richer than our four-dimensional space, more vibrant, more colorful. It also helps to know heaven is not simply a location "out there" somewhere but, biblically speaking, is more accurately defined by "the place where God is."

It helps further to know, then, that when Jesus came to earth the first time, He was announcing the kingdom of heaven was "at hand." Someday, according to Scripture, the Lord will return, and He will bring with Him a new heaven and a new earth, the restoration of all things. Here are three things this biblical vision of heaven changes:

■ **Going to church.** Suddenly church is more than improving my spiritual life or hearing a religious pep talk to get me through the week. Suddenly, church itself becomes a taste of heaven.

When we gather with our brothers and sisters to celebrate the Gospel and sing the praises of the sovereign Lord, we are providing a picture of what it will be like on that coming heavenly day.

Through our worship, we also stake a claim for heaven here on earth, giving others a window into the world where God's will is done in the reconciling of people to Himself for His glory.

■ **Going to work.** Many of us are tempted to simply treat our days like punching a clock for a paycheck, something to keep us warm and well-fed. If we dare dream big, we think along the lines of the American Dream of investing for our financial future, or putting the kids through



Guest opinion
with Jared C. Wilson

school, or leaving them a good inheritance. The immediacy of heaven transforms the way I view work. If in fact my daily work is a part of God's mandate to His people to take dominion and subdue the earth, then my workday becomes brimming with heavenly possibility. Through my work, I am laying up treasures in heaven. I work "as unto the Lord," trusting that even the mundane things I do are being stewarded by Him to accomplish His purposes on earth — and in the earth to come.

■ **Dealing with my past.** I believe because I've trusted in Jesus for my salvation. His perfect obedience becomes mine, and therefore my sins are forgiven and I receive the promise of living with Him forever. Because my struggle with sin is a daily reality, the promise of heaven becomes a daily encouragement. Further, as I struggle with wounds and hurts and accusations, as I deal constantly with pain from my past, by keeping my vision heavenward I can find great consolation every day in knowing He will make all things new, wipe away every tear, and even vindicate and validate all my suffering and pain. However great the trouble I've been through in the past, I know God will compensate me much more greatly in the future, which gives me tremendous joy in the present.

I don't know about you, but this changes heaven for me. No, heaven doesn't change but my vision of it does. Heaven becomes more real and more immediate and thus it changes my vision of things in my everyday life. Suddenly heaven doesn't seem so far off, but rather like it's around every corner.

Wilson is director of content strategy for Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press. Edited for style.

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Sutherland Springs lifted by influx of compassion

SUTHERLAND SPRINGS, Texas (BP and local reports) — Kris Workman, paralyzed during the Nov. 5 shooting melee at First Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, is leading worship from a wheelchair for the rural congregation.

Six-year-old Ryland Ward came home from the hospital Jan. 11 after multiple operations for four wounds inflicted by the gunman who killed 26 people that Sunday, including Ryland's mother Joann Ward and two of his sisters.



WARD

"There are so many people stepping up who want to help," said Ted Elmore of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC), from firemen and police in San Antonio to the SBTC and its churches across the state; the North American Mission Board (NAMB); a San Antonio-based independent grocery chain; a leading roofing firm; and the people of rural Sutherland Springs and nearby communities.

First Church has also formed a six-member restoration committee, including one member from a nearby town who was stirred to join the church after the massacre. The committee includes several First Church members described by Elmore as "wonderful, common sense laymen" along with a former associate pastor at the church.

"That's the nature of this community," said Elmore, who participates in one or more conference calls each week with the committee and First Church pastor Frank Pomeroy, whose 14-year-old daughter Annabelle was among the fatalities at the hands of Devin Kelley.

Kelley was forced to flee the church by an armed citizen who grabbed his rifle and rushed to the scene when he was told what was going on there. Kelley committed suicide after wrecking his pickup truck during an ensuing chase.

"Life has been forever changed for these folks but in spite of the deepest hurts, they have embraced and said, 'The devil will not win,'" said Elmore, the SBTC's primary contact person with the church by virtue of his work in the convention's pastor-church relations, field ministry, and prayer strategy.

Also on site for six weeks are Mike Landry, who works part-time with the SBTC in church revitalization, and his wife Connie. Both certified grief counselors, Landry is assisting Pomeroy in pastoral ministry as needed and visiting people in the community to hear and help heal their anguish.

"The SBTC serves churches. We're there to serve Sutherland Springs in their recovery," Elmore said. "All the decision-making is theirs, and we respect that."

The Rebuild

Meanwhile, NAMB is taking the lead in construction of a new worship center, education building, and memorial garden for the church. NAMB retained the firm of Myrick Gurosky & Associates in Birmingham, Al., as general contractors.

"We think roughly it will be one million to one-and-a-half million [dollars]," NAMB President Kevin Ezell said during a Feb. 6 meeting of the mission board's trustees.

The construction company has worked with the church for free to come up with a design for new buildings and walked through it with pastor Pomeroy and the leaders they have appointed," Ezell noted.

Concerning funding for the project, Ezell said, "There has been such a desire to help among Southern Baptists and... we will let churches know that if they want to give, they can. If 1,500 churches were to give \$1,000, that's \$1.5 million. In the SBC family, everyone who wants to can be a part of that."

NAMB spokesman Mike Ebert said the range for the cost of construction stems from anticipated donated services from various contractors who will be working on the rebuild.

Ebert told Baptist Press the rebuild will be a full-fledged construction project with a start and end date that will not entail the removal of the former worship center, which is now a memorial, nor an adjacent education building. Decisions on those facilities will be made by the church, he said.

Visitors welcome

The church memorial contains white chairs for each of the 26 victims where they each fell, in a freshly-painted white interior carefully patched to cover the bullet holes. It is being staffed by volunteers from churches in the local Gambrell Association and other churches in Texas such as First Church in Karnes City, Valley Hi First Church in San Antonio, and Christ Central Church in Robstown near Corpus Christi.

Visitors are welcome. The memorial is open from 10 a.m. until 2 or 3 p.m., Monday through Wednesday, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday through Saturday.

The volunteers greet visitors and "listen, pray with people, and if opportunity permits share the Gospel," Elmore said.

Pomeroy has reported more than 30 professions of faith. "Pastor Frank says it will remain open as long as people are getting saved. People have driven from various states and from Canada and one couple flew in from Germany to see the memorial," Elmore said.

First Church is currently meeting in a modular unit with 170-plus padded chairs. Worship leader Workman — a young man who once was a race car driver — fronts a praise band made up mostly of survivors and family members of victims.

It is a band that Elmore said could lead music in lively and worshipful fashion anywhere.

SBTC assistance to the church includes providing the pastor's salary for one year and a vacation for him and his wife for a time of healing later this spring. SBTC is also providing counseling as requested by those who lost loved ones and the wounded, along with their family members.



RYLAND WARD

"Life has been forever changed for these folks but in spite of the deepest hurts, they have embraced and said, 'The devil will not win.'"

Ted Elmore

Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC)

Pomeroy and his wife Sherri will be guests at the SBTC's Feb. 26-27 Empower Evangelism Conference, accompanying pastor Paul Buford and his wife Martha of River Oaks Church near Sutherland Springs.

River Oaks Church has opened its doors to the FBI, Texas Rangers, Red Cross, and other agencies and organizations since the shootings took place.

Also in the planning stages is an appreciation banquet for first-responders requested by the church, headed up by Elmore of SBTC and Kevin Cornelius, pastor of First Church in Karnes.

"There's no way you can repay the first-responders for what they did," Elmore said. "Their work was monumental." The gathering also will include grateful survivors and their families. "There's great healing in an appropriate hug," Elmore said.

Rallying to help

Among San Antonio-area businesses at the forefront of helping are the H-E-B independent grocery chain and Beldon Roofing Company.

Through its Spirit of Giving charity, H-E-B built ramps for the injured at their homes that meet ADA standards. The chain also provided direct aid to survivors and family members of the deceased through donations made at check-out lines in their Texas stores.

Beldon took the lead in funding restoration needed for the memorial and created a GoFundMe account that has raised \$1.2 million from nearly 500 donors since setting an initial goal of \$250,000 on Nov. 7.

Several other GoFundMe accounts have been created for the shooting victims, including one honoring Joann Ward and her two slain daughters: Brooke Ward, age five, who died in her mother's arms and Emily Garza, age seven and the middle of the family's five children.

In addition to Ryland, his father Chris and his oldest sister Rihanna, age nine, survived.

To GoFundMe donors, the Ward family wrote, "You have made a difference in how these children will grow up and face a life without their mother and siblings."

February 5 and subsequent days have not been good times for the stock market. The largest point drop in history took place February 5 with the Dow Jones Industrial Average closing lower by 1,175 points. Since then, there have been more major down days. I was tied up on February 5 in meetings one after another after another, and it was only at the close of the day that I knew the market had been so bad.

I was talking with a friend and the topic came up of the awesome drop. Like many of the folks on television and in their own homes, we were talking about what it meant. I reminded him of the stock market crash in the fall of 1929, when panic spread across all the land. Some people in desperation felt they had nothing for which to live and took their lives, literally jumping from buildings because they could not face the crisis that was taking place. I told my friend, "Don't you go jump off some building somewhere." He said, "Well, you know where I live we don't have any high buildings. About all I could do is jump off my front porch." I urged him not to hurt himself by taking that two- or three-foot dive off his porch.

February 5 was truly not a good day for the country, the stock market, and people who have investments and retirement tied up in the stock market. For some reason I thought about the man who was the keeper of the jail in the story of Paul and Silas in Acts 16. The Bible says when an earthquake hit the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison were open. For the jailer whose responsibility it was to keep all the prisoners locked up, the ultimate crisis had hit. What could he do? In panic he pulled his knife to kill himself. Taking that dagger and putting it to his chest, he was about to end it all because



Jumping Off the Front Porch

he thought his life had reached its end.

At that point the greatest moment in his life occurred when Paul and Silas said, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here" (Acts 16:28). The jailer said, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). The moment of truth and joy and endless possibilities was right before him. Paul said to him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31), and that is what the jailer did. Not only did he come to know the Lord, he brought his whole family to the Lord.

Life has its ups and downs, its earthquakes, and its Dow Jones shakes. What should we do? I encourage you to ponder three simple words that will make a difference for you on crisis days and every day:

■ **First of all, think.** Stop and think about what's taking place. For the jailer, his crisis turned out not to be

the end of his world. For most people across the land, February 5 was significant but not a world changer. It was the largest point drop in history — but it was not the largest percentage drop by any means. That's important. This is a good time to think about what it is in which you actually put your confidence: the Lord, or stocks and bonds or your own clever investment process? Worldly gain is always subject to adjustments, changes, even crashes. The truth for the believer is that at the end of the day, your value is what God has made you to be and not what dollars and cents and stocks and bonds make you think you are. Think about life. God's life in you and for you, and the value of what that means in light of that in which you may have put your confidence.

■ **The second word is trust.** "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee"

(Ps. 56:3), says the psalmist. Every denomination of money we have in America includes the phrase, "In God we trust." Well, do it. Trust Him. As Paul and Silas encouraged the jailer, put your trust in the Lord. Let Him do what only He can do and you can rest in Him. It is, "In God we trust," not "In Dow Jones we trust." Find a quiet moment to get with the Lord whatever the circumstances around you and come to that peaceful, joyful experience of resting and trusting in Him.

■ **When you think and while you trust, go a further step and thank.** Thank God for what you have. Thank God for the things that are lasting — a family that loves you, and friends and church relationships that are meaningful, nurturing, and strengthening to you. In 1929 when the stock market crashed, there were people who lost everything. Their stocks and bonds and investments all completely vanished, never to return. That has not been true in 2018. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped only four percent on February 5, and most of the earnings reflected in that four percent was what we had gained in January 2018.

For what do you thank God? Thank Him for all of the blessings He has given you that bring some sense of security and help. Thank God that February 5 wasn't nearly as bad as people made it out to be and that you are not just at the mercy of the ups and downs of markets. Rest secure in the mighty hand of God and His unfailing love and grace to you. For today, think, trust, thank — and whatever you do, don't jump off your front porch. You might skin your knee.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbcb.org.

Take steps to dive into exhilarating evangelism

By Andrew Hebert
Correspondent

Sharing the Gospel is a lot like skydiving. Most people never do it.

Many who try are terrified the entire time. Most are glad they did it. A few will catch the bug and do it again and again.

Even though sharing the Gospel is scary sometimes, my hope for my own church is that people will catch the bug to share the Gospel and begin to do it over and over again.

In the midst of a national downward trend in baptisms, what does it take to create an evangelistic climate in the church? While discussing this challenge with several friends in ministry, I've noted eight steps necessary to see a passion for evangelism take root in the church:

■ **Pray:** Ask God to do what man cannot. Every spiritual awakening in history has been preceded by prayer. Pray for brokenness over the lost. Pray



HEBERT

for God to bring people across your path who need Jesus. Pray for evangelistic fervor and boldness. Ask God to do in His strength what you cannot do in yours.

■ **Teach:** Show the value. Research on organizational culture has shown that in order to see people's behavior change, their underlying values and beliefs must change. Culture change in the church won't occur without a change of values, and the best way to shape the values of the church is to teach the Scriptures faithfully. Healthy and lasting change of any sort in the church is always grounded in God's Word. As a pastor, show the people what the Bible says about the importance of evangelism.

■ **Train:** Provide a method. Studies of church planting movements have demonstrated that leaders of rapid-growth multiplying church movements train believers to use simple, reproducible methods of sharing the Gospel. Whether it is Evangelism Explosion, 3 Circles, or Two Ways to Live, there are many great methods of sharing the Gospel that include the proper content of the Gospel as

well as an invitation to respond. Train your people to use one and encourage them to do so as often as possible. The more we share the Gospel the more effective we become.

■ **Plan:** Create opportunities to share. Gospel seeds won't sow themselves. Without intentionality, Gospel conversations won't ever happen. Many church members know they should share the Gospel, and even understand how to share the Gospel, but without a concrete plan to do so, they will be unlikely ever actually to share. Whether you take your people to share the Gospel in a local neighborhood door to door, or you invite members to leverage church-wide events as opportunities to share with the lost, work to create specific pathways and opportunities for church members to share the Gospel.

■ **Motivate:** Encourage it. One of the biggest obstacles to evangelism is fear. Remind your church members that as disciples we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who empowers our witness. Be a champion for evangelism both publicly and privately. Share stories of how you and the church staff are

sharing the Gospel. Challenge people to share the Gospel and then encourage them again and again to do it.

■ **Demonstrate:** Show how it's done. Good leaders lead by example. If you want an evangelistic church, model what an evangelistic lifestyle looks like. I'll never forget watching a mentor of mine share the Gospel with people on several occasions. Watching how he turned the conversation toward Christ and invited people to respond in a non-threatening way cemented in my own mind that sharing the Gospel was something that I could do. There was something about seeing it modeled that made everything I had been taught about evangelism crystalize.

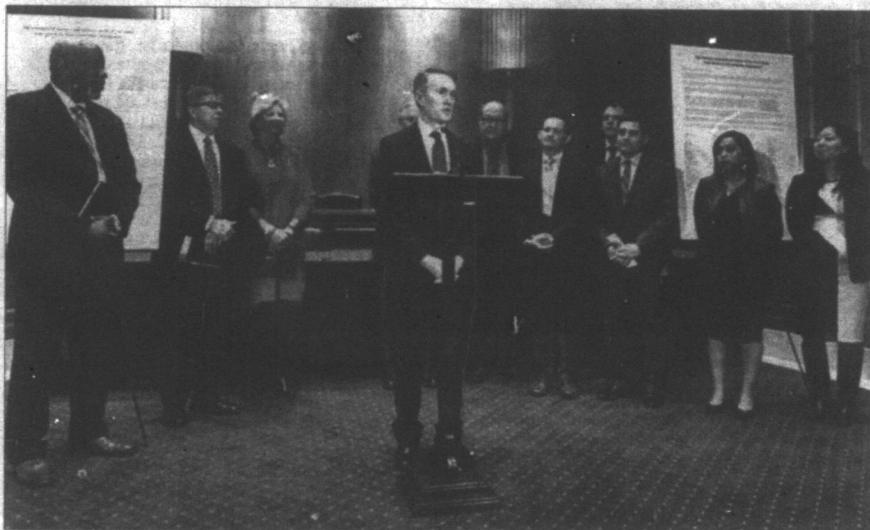
■ **Celebrate:** Savor the stories. Leaders reveal what is important by what they praise and what they condemn. When people share the Gospel, celebrate it. When a lost person trusts Christ, celebrate it. Share these stories on Sundays. Make a big deal of baptism. After all, "there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

■ **Replicate:** The student becomes the teacher. The goal

of sharing the Gospel is to make disciples who will make disciples. The evangelistic task isn't complete until we pass the disciple-making baton to others. As we teach, train and lead church members to share the Gospel, encourage them to teach, train and lead others. As we have opportunity to lead people to Christ, send new believers right back into the harvest to share with their family, friends, neighbors and co-workers.

Pastors are called to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5). Most days, I don't feel very effective in my attempts to be a witness for Christ. In personal evangelism, I rarely feel like we have the finesse of a quarterback throwing a beautiful pass down the field; often, it's like we're trying to do everything possible just to get a first down. My prayer for my church, as well as for others, is that we will relentlessly press forward in our evangelistic efforts until we see the ball move down the field.

Andrew Hebert, on Twitter at [@andrewehebert86](https://twitter.com/andrewehebert86), is the lead pastor of Paramount Church in Amarillo, Texas.



SOLVE THE PROBLEM — U.S. Sen. James Lankford (R-Ok.) addresses a Feb. 7 news conference in Washington, D.C., on the DACA issue with other evangelical Christian leaders, pastors, and senators. Russell Moore (third from right), president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, also spoke at the news conference. (BP photo)

Southern Baptist, evangelical leaders urge action on Dreamers

WASHINGTON (BP) — Southern Baptist and other evangelical Christian leaders and pastors joined United States senators Feb. 7 in urging the U.S. Congress and U.S. President Donald Trump, a Republican, to swiftly enact a remedy for undocumented immigrants brought into the United States as minor children.

The appeal in a Capitol Hill news conference came less than a month before the expiration of a program known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) that has given about 800,000 people relief from deportation.

If no legislative resolution is achieved by March 5, an estimated 1,000 people a day will lose their protection from deportation.

Former U.S. President Barack Obama, a Democrat, established DACA by executive order in 2012 to protect undocumented immigrants who arrived in this country before their 16th birthday. The Trump administration announced Sept. 5 it would end DACA but also instituted a six-month delay for Congress to act.

The Southern Baptists and evangelicals who spoke to reporters Feb. 7 said they were not endorsing a specific bill but calling on and praying for Congress and the White House to act before the deadline on behalf of Dreamers, a label that stems from the name of a bill introduced to protect that category of immigrants.

"We're here today to speak to the consciences of our elected leaders to say, 'Do not make invisible our Dreamer neighbors and our refugee neighbors,'"

said Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) in Nashville.

Moore told reporters the Christian leaders are saying to elected officials, "Do not simply kick this down the road. Do not ignore these people created in the image of God."

U.S. Sen. James Lankford (R-Ok.), a former staffer at the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, said at the news conference, "This is a unique moment that I think we're standing in that there's a deadline and a requirement to actually act on some issues related to Dreamers."

He is encouraging fellow senators to "not stop the work," Lankford told reporters. "[F]or these families that are waiting for this moment, they need to know what is the decision, what direction are we actually going in the law."

U.S. Sen. Angus King of Maine, an independent who caucuses with Democrats, said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has indicated he would bring "a kind of bare-bones bill" to the floor next week that would initiate an amendment process that would hopefully result in passage and momentum going forward to the U.S. House of Representatives and the President.

"We're not going to solve the whole [immigration] problem in the next week," King told reporters. "We're not going to solve all of the complicated — and believe me, they are complicated — issues involved in the immigration issue, but perhaps

we can solve a piece of it, and we can do right by these young people who came here through no fault of their own..."

Moore and other Southern Baptists explained to reporters the significance of Dreamers and refugees in congregations.

"Dreamers are not some abstract category for us," Moore said. "Dreamers are teaching Sunday school. Dreamers are leading door-to-door evangelism efforts in our communities. Dreamers are the ones who are baptizing, the ones who are teaching people to read in our communities. Dreamers are leading churches in the United States of America and when we see Dreamers in jeopardy, we see all of us in jeopardy. What hurts one part of the body of Christ hurts all of the body of Christ."

Jesse Rincones, executive director of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas, said, "For Hispanic Baptist churches, these issues are not theoretical or just statistics. These numbers represent people who are integral parts of our congregations — church members, Sunday school teachers, students, employees, community leaders, and even seminary-trained pastors, who are facing very real fears for the future if Congress doesn't act."

Thabiti Anyabwile, pastor of Anacostia River Church in Washington, D.C., shared about immigrants and refugees in the church and told reporters, "These are the folks that make up our churches. They're not just families out there. They are indeed our family. And many are in great need."

President: Faith heritage 'central' to country, liberty

WASHINGTON (BP) — America's heritage of faith and its ongoing experience of God's grace were U.S. President Donald Trump's focus in his Feb. 8 address to the 66th annual National Prayer Breakfast at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C.

"Each year, this event reminds us that faith is central to American life and to liberty," Trump said. "Our founders invoked our Creator four times in the Declaration of Independence. Our currency declares, 'In God we trust,' and we place our hands on our hearts as we recite the Pledge of Allegiance and proclaim we are, 'One Nation Under God.'"

Among Southern Baptists in attendance were:

■ Ronnie Floyd, pastor of Cross Church in northwest Arkansas and former president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

■ Jack Graham, senior pastor of Prestonwood Church, Dallas, and former president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

■ Robert Jeffress, senior pastor of First Church, Dallas, and commentator for Fox News.

■ Greg Laurie, senior pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, Ca.

U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise, a Louisiana Republican who was shot by an assailant in June 2017 while practicing for a congressional baseball game between Republicans and Democrats, delivered the morning's keynote address and spoke of miracles God performed to save his life following his mortal injury.

U.S. Army officer Scott Smiley also spoke with his wife Tiffany about his recovery following a 2005 suicide bombing in Iraq that left him blind. Members of the U.S. Congress from both parties offered prayers.

Trump quoted Ephesians 2:10 and said, "America's heroes rise" to the verse's call to do good works. He cited first responders and ordinary citizens who helped their neighbors during Hurricanes Harvey and Irma; firefighters who battled California wildfires; strangers who shielded one another from bullets during a mass shooting in Las Vegas; communities that have fought the nation's opioid crisis; and members of the U.S. military.

The President also spoke of America's "tireless" quest for justice and peace, noting that the U.S.-led coalition to defeat the Islamic State terrorist group "has liberated almost 100% of the territory just recently held by these killers in Iraq and all throughout Syria."

America "stands with all people suffering religious persecution," Trump said. He referenced government oppression and human rights violations in Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, and North Korea.

"Our rights are not given to us by man," Trump noted. "Our rights came from our Creator. No matter what, no earthly force can take those rights away. That is why the words, 'Praise be to God' are etched atop the Washington Monument, and those same words are etched into the hearts of our people."

Trump said Americans are "truly blessed" by God. "Across our land, we see the splendor of God's creation. Throughout our history, we see the story of God's providence, and in every city and town, we see the Lord's grace all around us through a million acts of kindness, courage, and generosity."

Floyd, president of the National Day of Prayer Task Force, told Baptist Press (BP) the breakfast "was a very engaging experience" and "a good reminder about the power of prayer."



PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS — U.S. President Donald Trump addresses the 66th annual National Prayer Breakfast on Feb. 8 at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C. (BP screen grab courtesy of CNN)

Just for the Record



LAKE WASHINGTON FIRST CHURCH, GLEN ALLAN, recently celebrated pastor Jimmy McLendon's 25th anniversary at the church. Shown, front row, are Kate, Rachel and Jenna McLendon; back row, Jordan, Jon Reed, Susanne, and McLendon.



FAIR RIVER CHURCH, BROOKHAVEN, hosted a combined choir Christmas cantata, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, including Fair River Church, Harmony Church, Arlington Church, Shady Grove Church, and Antioch Church. The choir was directed by Harvey Magee, minister of music at New Sight Church. Jay Anderson, pastor.



NEW HOPE CHURCH, FOXWORTH, recognized those with perfect Sunday School attendance for the 2016-17 church year Dec. 17, 2017. Shown are Sherrell Magee, 36 years; Dillon Smith, 12 years; Kristie Smith, 19 years; Jimmy Thomas, 48 years. Not pictured is B. B. Stringer, 62 years.



Jason West (left), minister of music and youth, is shown receiving his certificate of license to preach the gospel from pastor Robert Moore, **HAMILTON CHURCH, MONROE ASSOCIATION**.



LITTLE BAHALA CHURCH, WESSON, honored Evan Lambright, son of Scott and Shelly Lambright for Sunday Scout day. Pastor Bendon Ginn presented Lambright with a navy blue Bible.



Thirty-nine members of **CENTRAL CHURCH, MERIDIAN**, received certificates for successfully completing the 2018 January Bible Study of 1 Peter: Strangers in a Secular World. Pastor Glenn Jackson conducted the study on Wednesday and Sunday nights in January.



The seniors from **BAY SPRINGS CHURCH, BAY SPRINGS**, visited the Promise Land Journey exhibit in Collinsville.



Members of **NEW PROSPECT CHURCH, BROOKHAVEN**, read through the Bible in 2017. Shown are Glen Mullins; Pat Mullins, Naomi Windborne, Virginia Calcote, Virgil Calcote, James Sutton, JoAnn White, Charles White, and Keith Reynaud.



The children of **TOPEKA CHURCH, JAYESS**, presented their Christmas program, *A Red-Letter Christmas*, Dec. 17, 2017. Dale Authement, pastor.

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Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. **Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted.** Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

PLATT

cont. from p. 1

ting the Gospel to the nations, and I want to spend what little time I have left on this earth with urgency toward that end," he said. "This passion is what drove me to become IMB president, and I have sought to honor Him and you in this role over the last four years."

Platt said his decision to initiate the process seeking a successor is founded in concentrated prayer and fasting alongside counsel from various leaders across the Southern Baptist Convention over recent months.

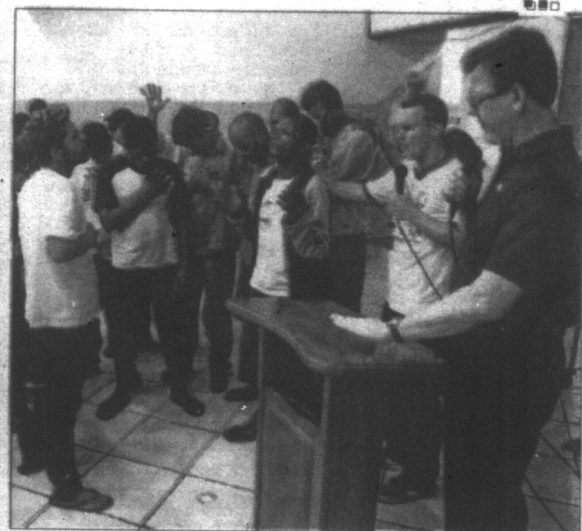
"I have come to the realization that it is not viable long-term for me to lead as president of the IMB while serving as teaching pastor in a church," Platt said. "This realization has been sobering, for I don't believe I can choose between preaching and leading in the local church, and mobilizing and shepherding people in global missions."

Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that if I am going to serve in this way in the local church, then I need to serve in different ways for the cause of global missions.

"I love this IMB family, and I want to encourage you continually with God's Word. I want to mobilize limitless missionaries to join you, and I want to work with you overseas in any ways I can help you."

In short, I want to do anything I can to see missions succeed across and beyond IMB and the SBC for the glory of God."

Platt and other senior IMB leaders have stated their commitment to the continuity of IMB's work during the successor search. Platt said they will continue to implement the initiatives that leaders in Richmond and around the world have put in place and



TO ALL NATIONS - David Platt (second from right), president of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, prays with new Christians who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior at Cristolândia, a Brazilian Baptist ministry that reaches out to drug addicts in São Paulo with a daily meal, shower, clean clothes, and the Gospel. (IMB Photo)

are aimed toward fulfilling the agency's mission.

An IMB press release stated that during Platt's tenure, the Southern Baptist missionary-sending agency has achieved a stable and healthy financial position, clarified of its mission, and recalibrated internal systems and structures around that mission.

"We have set the stage for a limitless mission force that is focused on the missionary task with urgent motivation and strong biblical, theological, ecclesiological, and missiological foundations," Platt said.

"We have sought to create collaborative processes in the IMB such that what we do doesn't revolve around one leader, but around all of us working together. Consequently, our vision for the

future remains the same: we will continue partnering with churches to empower limitless missionary teams who are evangelizing, discipling, planting, and multiplying healthy churches, and training leaders among unreached peoples and places for the glory of God."

Platt specifically encouraged the 3,500-plus IMB missionaries around the world to remain steadfast in their devotion to the missionary task in the place and the role where God has placed each of them, noting they "know better than anyone else: the nations need the Gospel."

Platt implored the missionaries to not let the news of his departure distract them from getting the Gospel to those who have never heard it.

Trustee chair Dunbar said after Platt's announcement, "I am thankful that David will continue to lead until a new president is elected. He wants to continue IMB's momentum and progress in reaching this lost world and making us a more effective organization to do that."

Platt was named IMB president in August 2014, succeeding former IMB missionary Tom Elliff who served as president for three years after the retirement of Mississippi native Jerry Rankin.

Trustees will begin their search for the 13th president of the 173-year-old entity following their next board of trustees meeting Feb 28-March 1.

"We are sad, but also feel confident in the future as we move forward," Dunbar said. "We trust that David's gifts of preaching, teaching, and writing will continue to bless the work of the IMB for many years to come, and we look forward to a long-term relationship."

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Answering the Critics • Acts 26:19-29

To be honest with you, this has been one of the hardest lessons to write this quarter. It has not been hard because I didn't understand what the Scripture was talking about. It was hard because I was convicted by the simplicity of it. Our lesson is about Paul telling both Festus and Agrippa (along with his wife Bernice) the story of his life and how Jesus came and changed it. It was simple and to the point. Even when Festus accused him of "being out of his mind and studying too much," Paul stood on the simple facts about Jesus: the prophecies, His suffering, to His death, resurrection, and the call to those who believe. Paul could speak to kings and governors with ease for the story was alive and thriving within his very being. It was here the conviction came...we have made telling others about Jesus harder than it needs to be. Perhaps we have made missions about a profession or a trip but have not made it a daily lifestyle.

We have heard the phrase, "We are all missionaries," but if that doesn't translate into our daily lives it will not be true. It was in Paul's DNA to tell everyone, kings and common people, how he met Jesus and his life was changed. It didn't matter that people disagreed, it was imperative that he

share. That sharing caused him to be beaten and imprisoned because what he shared offended his society just as this same gospel offends ours.

So, what is the difference between Paul and us? Here is the fact...Paul spoke like he did because he had a deep on-going relationship with Jesus. Jesus had literally changed his life and he couldn't help but tell. My high school pastor told me I would

never need training to evangelize if I ever had a life-changing encounter with Jesus. It was a bold statement on his part, but I never forgot it, and have since found it to be very true. Sadly, perhaps our problem in sharing Christ with others is because we don't have anything to share. Yes, we walked down an aisle, joined a church, and accepted Jesus as our Savior but we never allowed Him into our very beings where He could convict, heal, and change us deeply. Instead we have only a Sun-

day morning relationship with Him. To compensate for this, we developed programs to encourage us to share and out of guilt we "did" the programs without success. While that sounds harsh, the numbers of people who are coming to Christ in our communities is evidence of this truth.

Sharing Christ is not always going to be easy in this politically-correct world we live, but we were told that

it would not be easy. Jesus warned that the world would hate us, so why is it a surprise to us that we are not greeted with opened

arms? (Remember, Paul was in prison when he spoke the words of our text!)

Peter lived in a more dangerous world than ours yet he encouraged believers this way: "But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be intimidated, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready

at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." I Peter 3:14-15 (CSB) Don't miss the words, "for the hope that is in you!" That is the relationship part of this whole thing. Jesus gives us hope in a hopeless situation and we must be ready to share it no matter if people say we are out of our mind or studying too much. He tells us to be ready at any time, however, the gospel must thrive within us to be able to do this.

So, what is your relationship with Christ? Is it thriving or on life-support. I am not asking if you are saved, you probably are, but do you daily walk with Him? How has he changed your life? Do you walk in hope or despair over the world situation? Your honest answers will change you. Paul's answer to the critics was found on his way to Damascus. Mine was found on my face years after I walked the aisle. The place doesn't matter but we need an encounter with Jesus beyond just going to church. It is there we find our hope to share.

Grace is a Bible teacher and conference speaker and is a member of First Church, Clinton.



Explore the Bible
with Cyndi Grace

I Am Just Passing Through • I Peter 2:11-17

One of the most heated debates currently in our country is that of immigration. Everyone seems to have a passionate position on this issue. I am not going to get political, but every one of us would do well to take the time to research the scriptures and educate ourselves about what God has to say to about the "aliens and strangers" among us. If you are looking for a few starting places, check out Exodus 22:21, Leviticus 19:9-10, Deuteronomy 6:10-13, Jeremiah 22:3-5, Romans 12:13. This is only a handful of the plethora of verses in the Bible that address the issue of how we as God's children are to treat our fellow human beings. The next time you find yourself in a conversation regarding those coming into our country, equip yourself with the written word of God rather than the talking heads on radio or television.

The implications and applications of this week's lesson are both a challenge and a reminder to our American Christian mindset. We can get so bogged down in the here and now we tend to forget that each of us are just passing through. Strangers, if you will. How many of us think about how fleeting life truly is? I am willing to specu-

late few of us think of the brevity of life until tragedy strikes or the loss of a loved one. I will be turning 40 years old next month. It is a fact I am not too crazy about, but a fact nonetheless. I find myself more and more nostalgic lately. Have you ever read something so powerful that it took you to another place and time? It could be a song or even a book. For me, it was this quote, "At some point in your childhood, you and your friends went outside to play together for the last time and none of you knew it."

Perhaps it is the longing of what used to be appeals to our minds and heartstrings. Maybe it is the comforts of belonging gives us a sense of security in this uncertain world. I am proud to call Batesville my hometown although I have not lived there since 1998. I am also equally as thankful to call Scott County my home of almost 9 years. It is an honor to have been the pastor of Harpersville

Baptist for that length of time, but the truth of the matter is, I know that my residence is only temporary. My roots can only go so deep and my relationships will only be so meaningful. That is a bit sad, but it is also a true for everyone. You do not have to be a pastor to realize that life on this Earth does not last forever.

Because of the fact we are each just passing through, it should compel us

in several ways. First, it should cause us to realize. The realization we are in a sin-stained and fallen world can be depressing but it

also a reality until we make the move to be with the Lord. If you are a Christian, our earthly home is as bad as it gets. If you are not a Christian, your earthly home is as good as it gets. Which do you prefer? Secondly, prioritize. What you and I spend our money and time on the most reveal what matter to us. I do not know soul among

us if he/she knew they only had one week to live would not spend some of the time alone with God in worship and prayer. We would all like to have time with our family and friends to "get things in order," but we are not given that guarantee.

It has been said before you can be so heavenly-minded you are not any earthly good. There is some truth in that statement. It does matter how we live and conduct ourselves in a daily manner. Peter reminds the reader in I Peter 2:12 their behavior should be "excellent." Not for pride's sake, but so that when they are observed, others will glorify God and be drawn to Him by the life they live.

We began this article discussing strangers and the reminders for each of us we are all just passing through. I cannot wait until we get to Heaven where there will be no strangers in the household of God and we will all be neighbors. When God is King and the kingdom is His, there will be no borders. Now, that will be worth seeing! Will you be there?

McKay is pastor of Harpersville Church, Harpersville.



Bible Studies for Life
with Bobby McKay

LifeWay Research: Offerings generally up in 2017

NASHVILLE (BP) — Church collection plates were a little bit fuller last fall, according to a new study released Feb. 8 by LifeWay Research, the Nashville-based, evangelical research arm of LifeWay Christian Resources that specializes in surveys about faith in culture and matters that affect churches.

About 40% of Protestant pastors say their churches received more offerings in 2017 than in 2016. Three-quarters say their church met or exceeded budget. Only about a third say the economy gave their church trouble.

Those are among the findings of a report from LifeWay Research, based on a survey of 1,000 Protestant senior pastors that was conducted Aug. 30-Sept. 18.

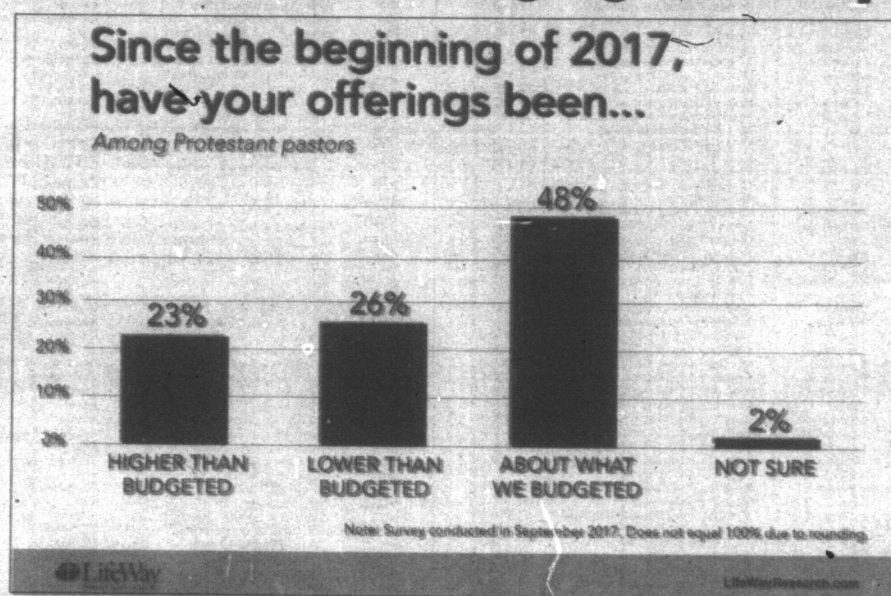
LifeWay Research has tracked the impact of the economy on churches since 2009, said executive director Scott McConnell. He noted this is the first time the majority of pastors said the economy isn't a problem for their church.

"The past decade has been difficult for many church budgets," McConnell said, "but things seem to be looking up."

Not worried

At the height of the Great Recession in 2010, LifeWay Research found most pastors (80%) said the economy had a negative effect on the church budget. That dropped to 51% by March 2016. In the most recent survey from the last fall, 35% of pastors said the economy had a negative impact on the church. Seventeen percent cited a positive impact, and 45% said no impact.

African-American pastors (59%) and pastors of churches with 50-99 attendees (40%) were more likely to say the economy was having a negative impact. Pastors of larger churches (250 or more attendees) were more likely to



say the economy was treating their church well (28%).

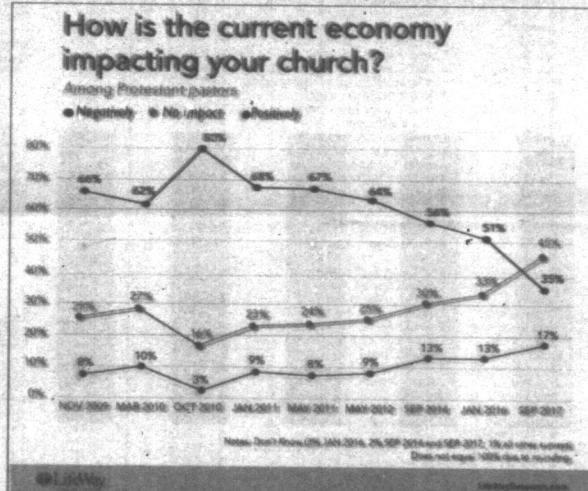
Mainline pastors (41%) saw more negative impact than evangelical pastors (32%). Lutherans (44%) saw more negative impact than Baptists (31%). Pentecostal pastors (25%) saw more positive impact than Baptist (15%) or Presbyterian/Reformed pastors (13%).

Offerings hold steady

About half of pastors said their church is meeting budget. Twenty-three percent said offerings were higher than budgeted. Twenty-six percent said offerings were lower.

Larger churches (250 or more attendees) were more likely to say offerings were higher (30%). Pastors of smaller churches (fewer than 100 attendees) were more likely to say offerings were lower (29%).

African-American pastors (41%) were more likely to say giving is under budget than



white pastors (26%).

More Baptist (27%), Pentecostal (30%) and Presbyterian/Reformed pastors (23%)

said offerings were over budget than Methodists (12%).

Baptist (30%), Methodist (34%), and Holiness pastors

(34%) were more likely to report budget shortfalls. Pentecostal pastors (17%) were less likely.

Overall, most pastors (78%) say offerings held steady from the previous year. Forty percent said offerings went up. Eighteen percent said they went down. Thirty-eight percent said offerings stayed the same.

Increases noted

Some churches of all sizes saw an increase from 2016. That included about half of churches with 100-249 attendees and 57% of churches with 250 or more attendees. Smaller churches fared a bit less well. Twenty-six percent of churches with fewer than 50 attendees saw an increase. Thirty-five percent of churches with 50-99 attendees said giving was up.

Pastors in the North, South, and West had a better year than those in the Midwest. Forty-two percent of pastors in the North, South, and West said giving was up. Only 34% of pastors in the Midwest said it increased.

More Baptist (45%) and Pentecostal (46%) pastors saw giving go up than Methodists (28%).

Few pastors saw major growth or decline in giving. One in five pastors said their church giving was up by less than 10%. Only four percent say their church offerings were up by 25%.

One in 10 pastors said giving dropped by 10-24%. Two percent of pastors saw a 25% decline.

Still, churches seem to be regaining their footing as the economy improves, McConnell said. "Overall, 2017 was a good year for church budgets. Except for isolated local downturns, the financial struggles of churches not meeting budget likely have nothing to do with the overall economy."

S.C. church accepts responsibility in abuse case

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP) — An apology, admission of liability, and \$300,000 payout are among the terms First Church of Columbia, S.C., reached to settle a case involving a child who was reportedly sexually abused by a former church volunteer.

Confessing "a broken and contrite heart," the church apologized and read an explanatory statement including the full terms of the settlement to its congregation in its Feb. 4 morning worship service, church spokesman Bryan Barnes told Baptist Press (BP).

"Today, we want to offer an apology for the inappropriate and unacceptable conduct this young man endured and express regret for what we failed to do to

prevent it," according to a nearly 1,400-word document Barnes gave BP.

"We are sorry that this young man was wronged and that our policies and procedures as well as our enforcement of those policies and procedures were insufficient to protect him. No student should have to experience what this young man endured."

A teenager identified in the October 2017 lawsuit as "Joel Doe" reportedly suffered abuse including inappropriate text messages at points between the ages of 11 and 16 from former youth volunteer Andrew McCraw.

"[Joel Doe] and his family deserved our best efforts, as does every family who entrusts their child to the programs and ac-

tivities of our church," the statement reads. "We are grateful this student alerted his parents to the wrong actions of this trusted volunteer. ...The young man (student) did the right thing."

"The legal matter with this young man has been resolved and First Baptist Church is taking steps to better protect the youth of this church."

In a statement to Baptist Press and other news services, Barnes said the church regrets that it did not have a policy specifically regarding texting in place to prevent such abuse.

"First Baptist has accepted responsibility for this even though we had strong policies in place and performed a background check on the volun-

teer which revealed no issues," Barnes said in the press statement. "What we did not have at the time was a policy specifically forbidding texting between an adult and a student without copying another adult. Such a policy, if followed, could have prevented these messages."

The settlement did not require the church to admit to what the lawsuit claimed was a long-held practice of concealing sexual abuse, a claim the church continues to deny. In alleging a conspiracy, the lawsuit pointed to a 2002 criminal case involving former deacon John Hubner, who is currently serving a 36-year prison term for sexually abusing a teenage girl who attended the church.

The church's insurance company will cover the \$300,000 payout, the church told congregants. In addition to the apology and admission of liability on the part of the church and senior pastor Wendell Estep, the church agreed to have its applicable policies updated by a third party experienced in sex abuse prevention.

The church also agreed to keep confidential the name of the child who was abused.

Joel Doe and his parents are still pursuing a lawsuit against McCraw in which an alternative dispute resolution hearing is set for May 8 in Richland County 5th Judicial Circuit Court, according to online court documents.